

2012 MEDAL WINNER CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY

Speakers: Barbara L. Flynn, Gladys Leeks

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>> FEMALE SPEAKER: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways.

Contra Costa Community Library Director Barbara L. Flynn and community member Gladys Leeks traveled to Washington from Pleasant Hill, California to receive the National Medal and spoke to IMLS about how the library impacts the community.

>> BARBARA L. FLYNN: Contra Costa County Library is in Contra Costa, California which is across from San Francisco. It means the other side so we are the other side from San Francisco. We have twenty-six libraries in eighteen cities and 1,000 square miles.

We serve everyone from babies in the lap to the eldest senior citizen with a variety of programs which does include books but it is not limited to books. It is books, it is DVDs, CDs, books on tape, electronic books.

We like to say and I truly believe that the library is at the heart of the community. Project Second Chance is our literacy program for adults. It gives people a second chance at life at learning how to read and spell and enjoy all the wonderful things that books have to offer.

>> GLADYS LEEKS: The first visit to the library, I was taking my grandchildren and checking out books and bringing them back so they could read. I brought them to the library because I grew up not knowing how to read and spell and wanted to make sure that they took every opportunity, everything that I could give them that they would learn and know how to read and spell going up.

I lost 104 pounds from Weight Watchers. My desire was to work for Weight Watchers and so to work for Weight Watchers one of

the requirements was to read. I had to learn the program. I had to read about the program. And they told me they didn't know if I would be able to work for Weight Watchers because they had never run into anyone who read.

My oldest son who is a doctor told me to check out a program that was at - he just said - he just gave me where the program was. It was at the library. And I told him no. I've been through programs all my life. All from a child I was in special ed, every kind of program there was, adult educational programs, and it would always lead back to the same. I would go no further than where I was.

So really it was to kind of close his mouth because he wasn't giving up. I went to this program and I don't know - what is Karen? Karen - what is her?

>> BARBARA L. FLYNN: She is a tutor/trainer.

>> GLADYS LEEKS: The tutor who was excellent and I sat down and she had me read. But the main thing that I learned from the beginning was as everybody all my life had always told me sound it out, sound it out. So when Karen, the instructor, said sound this out and that was the first time I asked her what is a sound?

I didn't know what a sound was. I didn't know that letters had sounds. And so when that came about, I started getting training to learn the sounds. Sounds had - would spell words.

I don't think people know that these programs are at the library. I had heard years and years ago that the library had a program that would train - that would teach you how to read. The first thought when into my mind; these were retired people who had nothing else to do and decided they wanted to come in and help, maybe help teach somebody how to read without the skills. So my thought was no.

But now these tutors that they have now, they are skilled.

>> BARBARA L. FLYNN: It is a volunteer program. We train volunteers to be tutors and do everything we can to meet our individual students' needs, to teach them to read and spell.

>> GLADYS LEEKS: Project Second Chance opened a door that opened the world of reading that opened another life. I don't

think you realize, most people don't realize if you can't read,
you don't function.